



# CRIES OF FREEDOM

DT  
1945  
W65  
1988

WOMEN IN DETENTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

For all the women, named and nameless,  
whose lives are bound up in these pages.

# **CRIES OF FREEDOM**

**WOMEN IN DETENTION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

This book is a slightly edited and updated version of the book which first appeared under the title *A woman's place is in the struggle, not behind bars*.

It was produced in South Africa with the above dedication, by the human rights groups DPSC and Descom (Detainees' Parents Support Committee and the Detainees Support Committee) in February 1988. On 24 February the DPSC, with 17 other community organisations, was effectively banned from continuing its work. The book itself was banned within weeks.

The title page of *A woman's place is in the struggle* carried the following statement:

**There are many things we wanted to write about.  
The contents of this book have been severely  
restricted in terms of the Emergency  
Regulations.**

CIIR would like to thank War on Want for its support in producing this book. As in the original version, special thanks are due to the women of DPSC/Descom.



# CONTENTS

## 1

WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE 7

## 2

LIVING UNDER THE STATE OF EMERGENCY 11

## 3

WOMEN IN DETENTION 17

## 4

THREE WOMEN SPEAK 24

## 5

DETENTION: THE FACTS 31

## 6

POLITICAL TRIALS 1985-1987 39

## 7

WATHINT' ABAFAZI, WATHINT' IMBOKOTHU 46

FREE THE CHILDREN



# CRIES OF FREEDOM

Cries of freedom, I seem to hear  
a crack of a whip  
and a whine of a grenade at the same time  
I seem to hear a long cry of an old woman  
Basi Ndiqolele Andinalo I Pasa

Shh! Listen!  
Cries of freedom  
Cries that will soon come to an end  
If cries do not come to an end  
Africa has to speak of more death

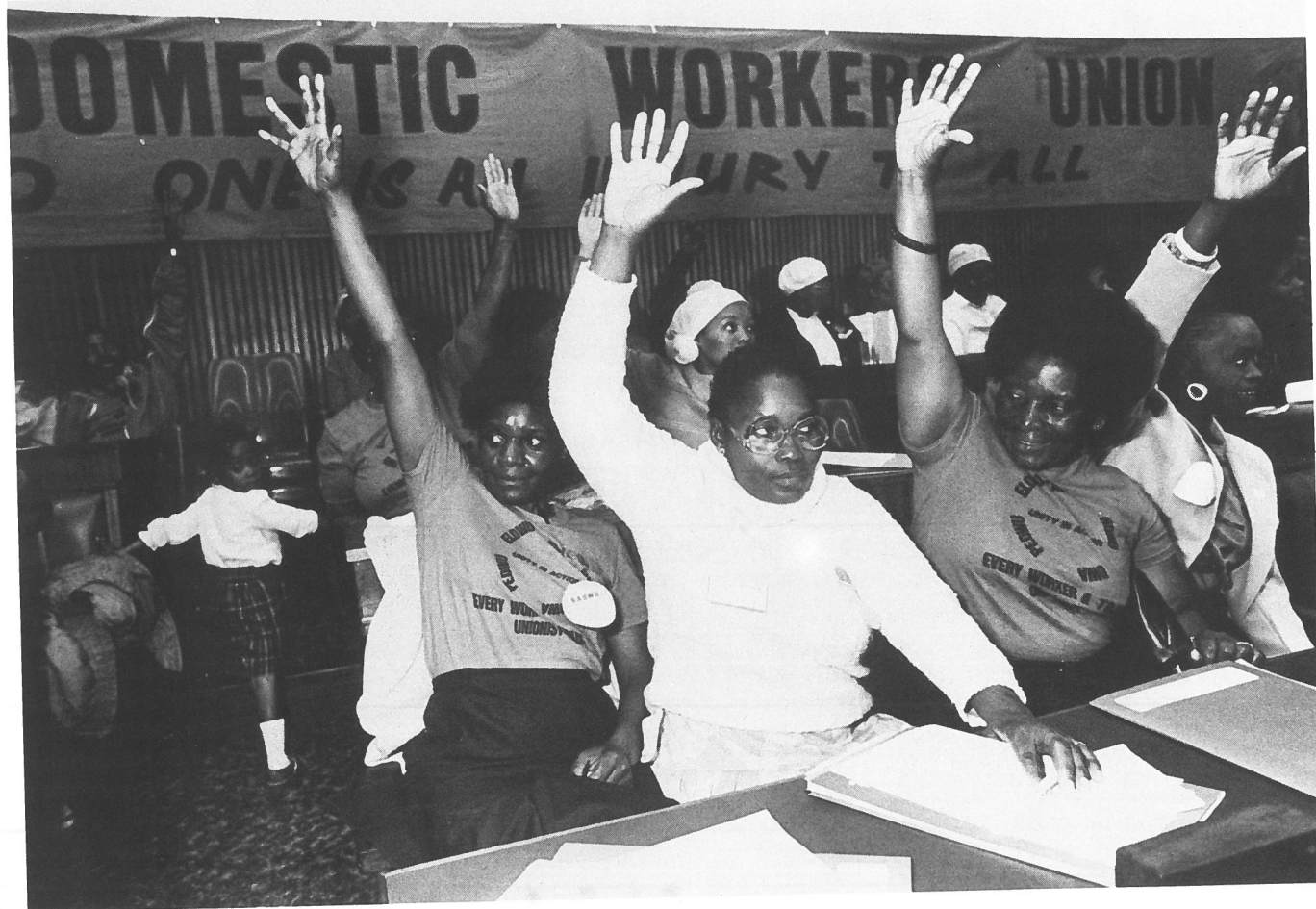
And Africa has to speak of revenge  
We sought equal rights and equal education  
We sought SRCs and we found it  
We found it with the carried bodies  
of Solomon Mahlangu and Emma Sathekge

I seem to hear an oozing of blood  
As the power of full rain in the summer  
Another victim of apartheid is crying  
Cries of freedom.

This poem was delivered to a woman in detention, written for her by a young girl in the next cell. SRCs refers to Students Representative Councils.  
OPPOSITE Singing at an International Children's Day event hosted by the Free the Children Alliance.

---

**United in resistance ...  
Domestic workers join together  
in the fight against exploitation  
at the launch of their national  
union in 1986.**



# 1 WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE

SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN have been a vital force in the mass struggle against apartheid, bringing renewed vigour to the tradition of resistance which flourished in the 1950s and has survived decades of repression.

In urban squatter camps and rural villages, women have been key participants in mobilising against mass evictions and the forced removal of communities. Domestic workers have come together to fight against the long hours and pitiful pay which makes them the most exploited sector of South African workers. Elsewhere in the rapidly growing trade union movement, women are increasingly evident in the struggle against apartheid.

In the communities, the fight against apartheid includes rent boycotts in protest against the racially based municipal councils. Consumer boycotts of white owned business are designed to put pressure on the business sector to take a stand against apartheid. These actions depend on the decisive support of women, who in many cases are the heads of households.

In schools and universities, girls and young women have stood in solidarity in class boycotts and actions demanding democratic control of education.

In white communities, women have campaigned against military conscription, bringing wide attention to the role of the armed forces in defending apartheid.

Given this level of activism, it is not surprising that approximately 3,050 women have been detained without trial under the emergency rule in the last year. Most of them have since been released. What is surprising is that women comprise only 8 to 12 per cent of the total number of people detained in the crackdown against organisations which have spearheaded resistance to apartheid.

The reason appears to lie partly in the fact that women are located principally among the rank and file of popular organisations and few have yet risen to leadership positions. This incomplete representation of women in the structures of resistance has been acknowledged and challenged by women who support the United Democratic Front (UDF), the largest anti-apartheid alliance in the country. The UDF, launched in 1983, is a grouping of more than 600 organisations – some local, others national. They include youth organisations, student groups, women's associations, trade unions, political



bodies, service organisations and residents' associations. They share the ideal of a non-racial, united and democratic South Africa. The UDF and the trade union federation COSATU have taken up the challenge of encouraging 'the maximum participation of women'.

As analysis of categories of women detainees shows, the women who have been detained in the last year appear to be held for their roles within broader community organisations – not for the activities of particular women's groups. Activists in the wider anti-apartheid struggle have a new determination to fight sexism as well as racism and economic exploitation.

The history of women's participation in the struggle for liberation in South Africa is virtually as old as the formal constitution of the region as a nation-state. Between 1910 and 1920, black women participated in the first campaigns against the hated 'pass' – the document which limited the number of black people allowed access to the cities and the jobs they offered. In the same period, women participated in Mahatma Gandhi's early experiments in non-violent resistance, opposing the restrictions on movement of Indian South Africans. Some 40 years later, when massive passive resistance campaigns were launched against the new discriminatory legislation of the white minority government, women were among those who defied racial laws and offered themselves up for arrest in their thousands.

This served as a prelude to the most extensive and sustained campaign launched by women – the campaign against the extension of the 'pass' system to women. Marches on government offices, isolated cases of 'pass' burnings, and work stayaways were among the methods women used to fight the Government as their officials attempted to issue the hated document.

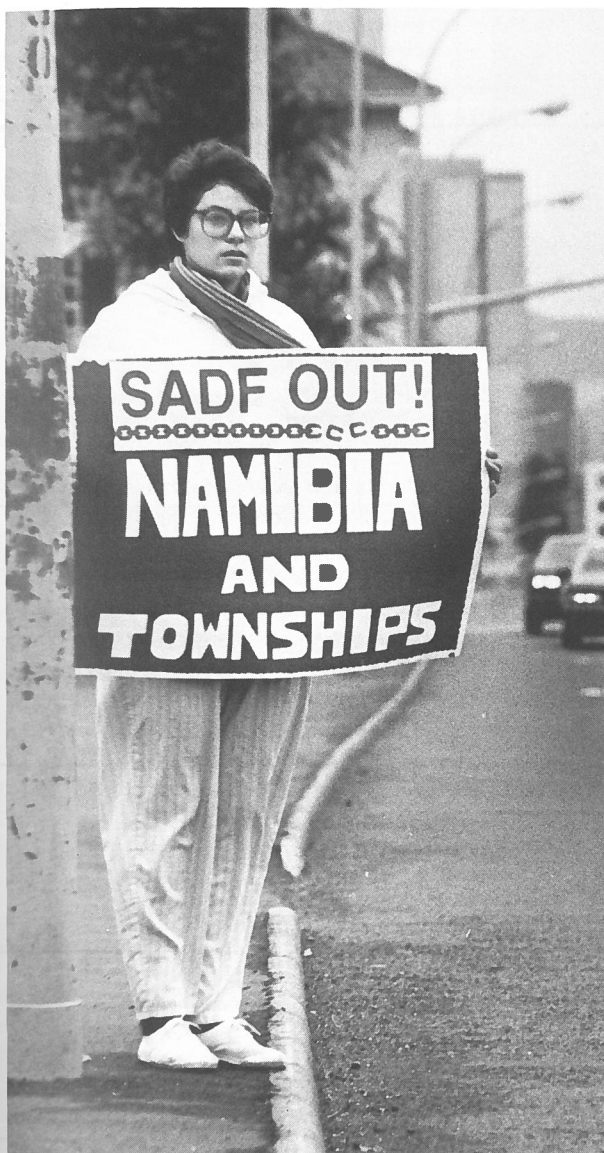
The campaign, organised by the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) which had been formed just two years earlier, climaxed with a mass march by 20,000 women on the Prime Minister's office in Pretoria in August 1956 to deliver masses of written protests to his doorstep. Finding Prime Minister Strydom's office empty, the women stood in silent protest for 30 minutes, before singing their defiant chant:

'Strydom, you have tampered with the women  
You have struck a rock  
You have unleashed a boulder  
And you will be crushed'.

The protest and the anthem have passed into the folklore of political organisations. But FEDSAW, a federal structure with the Women's League of the African National Congress (ANC) as its mainstay, was crippled when the ANC was outlawed in 1960. Only now have women's organisations regained sufficient ground to contemplate resuscitating the federation. This does not mean that women have been inactive – but rather that their struggles have been focused on specific issues or channelled through more general organisations.

In the famous Cape Town squatter settlement of Crossroads it was the women's committee that mobilised much early resistance against the destruction of the camp and the dispersal of its residents to impoverished and overcrowded rural reserves. They were subjected to repeated arrest for trespass and for lacking the appropriate 'passes' to be in the area. They were deported en masse to the distant bantustans (reserves) and resolutely found their way back to Cape Town across hundreds of miles.

Forced population removals across South Africa have drawn out the fire in women. In the Northern Transvaal area of Batlokwa – which won its



battle against being uprooted – women simply drew a line in the dust between themselves and the approaching removal squad and, farm implements in hand, challenged the officials to cross the line.

Where there have been mass detentions of children and menfolk, women have on occasion marched on police stations – in defiance of the law against all outdoor gatherings – to demand the release of their family members.

And as residents' organisations – often known as 'civic associations' or 'civics' – have become increasingly decentralised in structure, forming committees in every street and block of the most politicised townships – women have started to exert their influence on housing and neighbourhood issues. Women have been amongst those arrested for being involved in street committees which the government views as subversive and designed to supplant its own structures of authority.

In trade unions a small group of women have played a leading role as organisers and an increasing number are involved in shop floor representation. One of the massive strikes sustained and won during the State of Emergency was fought largely by women working for a national retailing chain.

Under South Africa's State of Emergency, detention without trial has been one of the weapons of repression used by the State. Women, young and old, have been among those who have found themselves in the prison cells of apartheid.

**A member of the End Conscription Campaign protests at the South African army's occupation of Namibia and the black townships.**



**Repressive Emergency laws have brought great suffering to women and their families.**

**A moment of joy for Sister Bernard Ncube, leader of the Federation of Transvaal Women, released on bail after 16 months in detention. The case against Sister Bernard was dismissed.**

# 2

# LIVING UNDER THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

## JUNE MLANGENI

June Mlangeni of the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) made this statement at a press conference on 11 December 1987, to mark 18 months of the State of Emergency and to launch the 'Unlock Apartheid's Jails' campaign.

“My dear brothers and sisters, we are facing 18 months of a siege as people; this way of life which forces us to live like caged animals in our own homes is called a State of Emergency. As women we have to put up with our homes being raided by strangers. We constantly wait for the knock on the door at ungodly hours, that knock which will take yet another child.

We sit in our homes day after day wondering what is happening to our children who are in prison and those who live as moles underground because they must continue with our struggle. The effect of this type of worry causes the worst heartbreak any person can endure.

On another level, women, like all other sectors in our country, face exactly the same forms of repression meted out by the government. Women are detained and kept away from their families for months on end.

At home their absence as mothers creates problems for the family and the daughters who are detained create worry because of the constant fear that they may be raped or killed by the police. The fear that other children may be accused by a legal system which protects the rights of a minority is always there. I know that in the 1960s when the first Emergency was declared, we struggled as people to group together again – this time we are still going to continue our struggle for freedom even if they detain us all. Do you know, brothers and sisters, this government has robbed us of everything we hold dear.

The Emergency detainees can only be visited once every 14 days for 30 minutes – we are being robbed of watching our children grow and they are locked away from us.

Women, as you know, and in particular black women, have long passed the days when we were dependent on others for an economic existence, and the State of Emergency affects even this part of our lives – when we visit children we have to take unpaid leave – this only means less food can be bought.

Consider my life as a woman. I have lived under a State of Emergency for 24 years. My life is not

my own. I can see the man I love only when the state says so and I have had to raise my children on my own.

No government has the right to do this to human beings who ask only for what is rightly theirs : Freedom!

The State of Emergency is affecting all of us : you, me and even the government.

Worst of all it is affecting the people who have to defend it in the townships – those youngsters who search our homes and even our bodies – those youngsters who are brainwashed into believing that blacks are monsters.

We as women say:

- Away with the State of Emergency
- Unban the organisation of the people and give our leaders back to us.
- No State of Emergency will ever crush the will of the people of South Africa!''

## **SISTER BERNARD NCUBE**

Sister Bernard is a 53 year old nun who lives in St. Mary's Convent in Kagiso, Krugersdorp. She is known throughout her community with deep affection as *Mma Rona* (Our Mother) – the mother of Kagiso. She is a member of the Companions of St. Angela. Sister Bernard has been a nun since 1955. She comes from a religious Catholic family and has always been known as a deeply spiritual person with a commitment to her community and especially to women. She was elected president of FEDTRAW in 1984.

The only nun ever to be charged with political offences in South Africa, Sister Bernard was brought to trial accused of subversion, sedition and assault, along with 13 other residents of Kagiso and Munsieville. The case was dismissed early in 1988. Before the court case was over, she told her story.

'I was detained on the eve of the State of

Emergency in June 1986. I did not have time to put my things together and could only take a few of the supplies that I knew I would need. They took me to the police station and there I saw many of my friends from the community who had also been detained. We then knew that there was to be another State of Emergency, but we did not know how long we were going to be detained.'

Sister Bernard was held in solitary confinement under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act for over a year, spending a total of 16 months in detention.

'Our prisons are man-made "hells on earth", places of torture and suffering. What do you think of an animal in a cage, with all of its instincts to be out there free to move, longing to live its life, as was meant by the Creator? Now it finds itself in manacles, unable to move or enjoy the freedom God gave it. I thought that I was one of them during those months – cut off from friends, parents, everything that was meant to help me be a human being was taken away. I was a kind of a robot. Someone decided when I could come out, or go in, when and what I was to eat. Everything was controlled. I lived at the hand of someone else. I learned what it was to be resigned.'

She was originally detained under the Emergency Regulations, along with another sister from her convent, who was suffering ill health when she was detained and died after her release. The death of this sister was very difficult for Sister Bernard, especially since she only heard about it some months later. She was entirely separated from her community of nuns. 'No one even told me that my sister had died, and when I found out there was nothing I could do except pray; and I had no one to talk to. I still can't believe that it is true because I haven't been allowed to go back and see her grave.'

Sister Bernard's own health was jeopardised



in detention. Due to a medical condition, she requires a special diet and medication. She had to fight for several months to have her dietary and medical needs met. 'The doctor in prison did what he could, but it was very difficult to get what I needed.'

She spent 23 hours a day in complete isolation from her fellow detainees and the outside world. Upon her incarceration she was told that she had 'lost her civil rights now'. 'Without any civil rights', queried Sister Bernard, 'how are you still a human being, what kind of an object is a person? I didn't know what that entailed at the beginning. Gradually I came to understand it was a period in which you have nothing to do with the world and your friends. You are just kept there in that cage. Time and space seem non-existent because you just live from day to day. You need a strong spirit in you to build you up in these periods because you have nothing else.'

With no one to speak to, nothing to read except her Bible, and no contact with the outside world, Sister Ncube's faith and commitment to her community only deepened during detention. 'I have a deeper strength than ever and a deeper commitment. The Bible meant a lot to me, it was an answer to my situation in a very realistic way. The Bible spoke for itself in detention; I had never had so much time to study it. The Bible is the foundation of "politics", it addresses itself to the structural sins of society. The sins of society are a major rebellion against God and the fundamental causes of war and bloodshed. Our society does not address itself to this rebellion against humanity.'

Sister Bernard was more concerned with the plight of her women co-detainees than her own situation. 'Detention is an emotionally wrecking trauma for women. They are separated from their families and that is the worst trauma that a woman can

face. A woman is living a normal life with her family and then she is grabbed out of the family and thrown into a position where she cannot even see her three year old child. It is really an effort for these women to cope, to be always thinking and worrying about her family, especially those women who are the only breadwinners for their families. At least I did not have to cope with the pain of always wondering how my children were. But I come from a large family of 11 and my parents are elderly; I had to worry about how they were and what was happening to them and to all my nieces and nephews.'

## **KHOLA MAYEKISO**

Khola Mayekiso is the wife of detained trade union leader Moses Mayekiso, currently on trial for treason after more than six months in prison without charge. Since his detention, Khola has been the sole supporter of her parents, his parents, and the youngest boy in Moses's family who is still at school; as well as having to make provision for their seven children.

With Moses in jail, their children had to be sent to relatives to be cared for. They are staying a long way from Khola's home, and she rarely sees them. It is an expensive trip both in time and money.

Because she is known as the wife of Mayekiso, her life has been spent away from home since the 1986 'unrest' events in Alexandra that led to Mayekiso's detention. Her own safety is a major concern. Many people continue to be detained, arrested or abducted; some just disappear in the night.

Separated from her children, her home and her husband, Khola has had to continue to work to support the large extended family as well as find the time and transport to make the trip to prison to visit her husband and his brother, who is also on trial. As

Moses was detained under Section 29 until he was charged, it was more than six months before Khola could see her husband.

Not only is she concerned with her own situation, but the families of many other detainees come to her to ask for her help for money or transport so that they can see their relatives who are also in detention. She helps when she can but resources must come from her own pocket. There is not enough to go around. So she must try to cope with their frustrations and pain as well as her own. Khola faces all these problems alone. 'Without Moses, it is very, very hard.'



## IVY GCINA

Ivy Cikiswa Gcina, the Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation (PEWO) president, was detained on 12 June 1986 – hours before the State of Emergency was declared – and is still being held under the Emergency regulations.

Mrs Gcina worked for many years as a school cleaner and first became politically involved during the ANC campaigns of the 1950s. When community organisation was revived in Port Elizabeth in the late 1970s, she joined the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO). In 1983 she played a central role in the revival of women's organisations in the Eastern Cape and the following year was elected president of PEWO. She has also served on the Eastern Cape UDF general council.

In July 1985, when the first Emergency was declared, Mrs Gcina was detained and held without trial for over four months. In an affidavit presented to court during the Wendy Orr\* application, she said that on 30 July 1985, she was severely assaulted by police at Port Elizabeth's Louis le Grange Square. She also said police deliberately sprayed teargas in her face while she was in detention and threatened to shoot her children unless she co-operated with them.

Mrs Gcina, who has four children, has been the victim of several attacks suspected as the work of right wing vigilantes. She was detained at her home at midnight on 12 June. Her case has been taken up by Amnesty International who have conducted a letter writing campaign to the State President on her behalf.

\* District Surgeon Wendy Orr exposed a widespread practice of police assaults on detainees in the Eastern Cape.

**Khola Mayekiso (in light dress), wife of trade union leader Moses Mayekiso, leaves after a day in court where Moses is on trial for treason.**

## TERROR ATTACKS

Detention is only one aspect of apartheid repression. People in communities, particularly activists and their families, live with the constant threat of violent attacks. Women in the community are often the victims of assaults, attacks by sponsored 'vigilantes', house burnings, shootings. Security forces and very often, municipal police or *kitskonstabels*\* are perpetrators of open brutality, random harassment, and attacks on the families and homes of activists.

Since so many activists have been detained or have disappeared, repression against their families has become a trend. Family members are sometimes taken as hostages in order to elicit information about activists' whereabouts. Masked informers are used to identify people and 'wanted' lists are circulated. Rumours and false information manipulated by state forces create fear and mistrust in terrorised communities.

Women are affected by the detention, assault and disappearance of their family members. Often it is the sole breadwinner of an extended family who is detained or killed.

Vigilantes have been responsible for the killing or raping of many women. The brutal murder of Victoria Mxenge in Natal in 1985, a leading lawyer and leader in both the United Democratic Front and the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), has never been solved. Mrs Mxenge's husband also died at the hands of unknown killers.

There have been many cases of women having had their homes burnt and destroyed, often while the security forces were searching for their sons or husbands. When shacks are demolished and destroyed, it is usually women and their children who suffer and who have to move, rebuild their homes, and try to provide for their families.

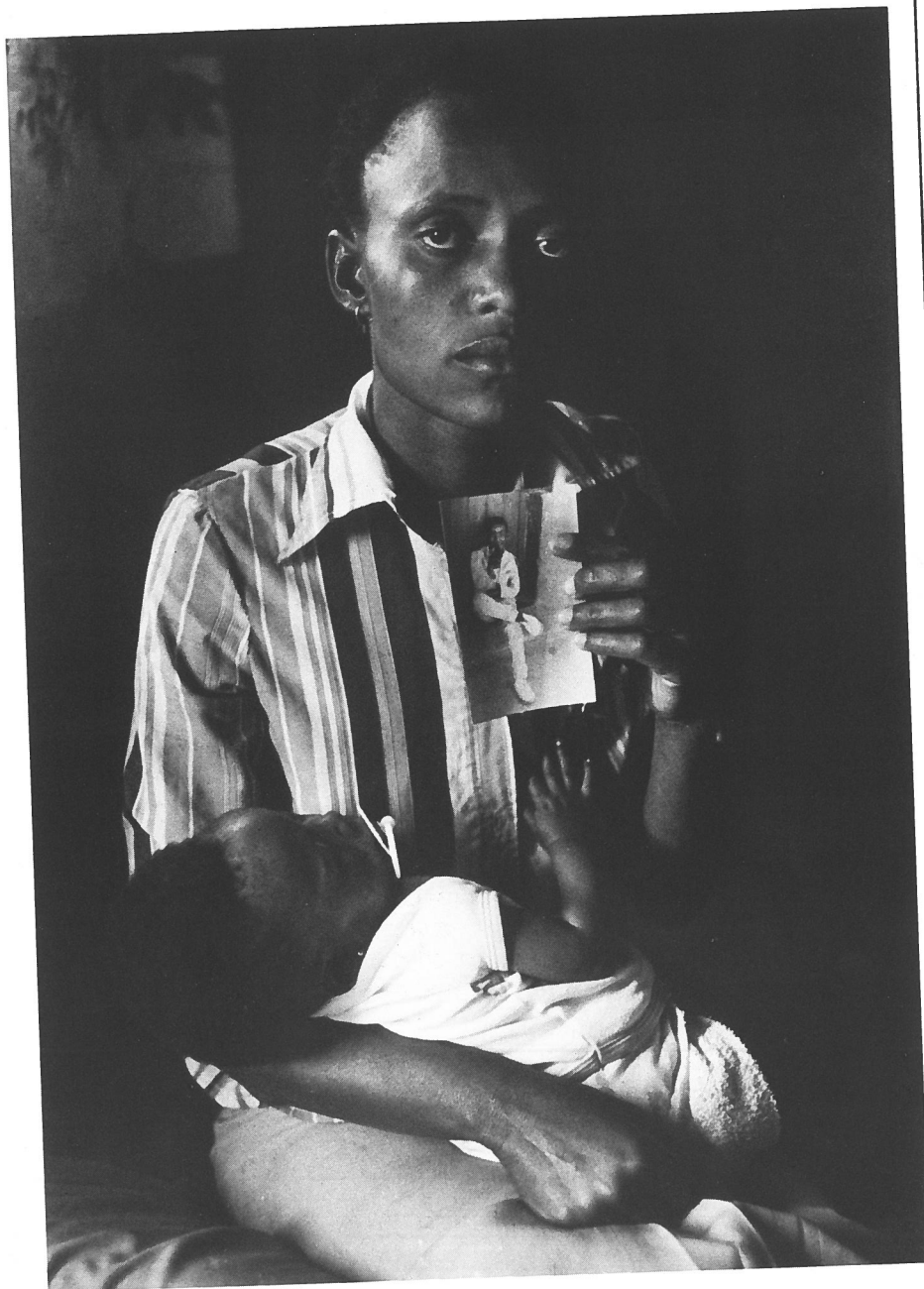
► Police arrived at a woman's home looking for her son. They assaulted her and her two young daughters in order to find out where the son was. One daughter was forced into the boot of a car and threatened with imprisonment if she did not give them the information.

► A 12 year old girl was shot in the back while walking home from the shop. She was hospitalised for one month under police guard, prior to being taken to prison. The doctors said that they could not remove the bullet for fear of paralysis. She was given a five year suspended sentence for stone-throwing.

► A 24 year old woman was shot while walking home from the shop. She was detained in isolation for two weeks with 100 pellets in her leg, and no medical treatment. Upon her release, she found that she had lost her job as a domestic worker.

► Three policemen abducted a woman, her infant and her husband. On the way to the police station, they stopped the vehicle to assault her husband. He tried to run away, and was shot five times. The woman was taken home; her husband lay in the veld. The police phoned for a van to take the body to the mortuary.

\* literally, 'instant' police constables, newly recruited municipal police who receive about six weeks training



**Women, men and children have been detained without trial – and detention deeply affects both detainees and their families and friends.**

**A mother shows a photograph of her detained child.**

# 3

## WOMEN IN DETENTION

CONDITIONS OF IMPRISONMENT for detainees and convicted prisoners vary from prison to prison and according to specific laws, whether they are held under Emergency laws, the Internal Security Act, are awaiting trial or are convicted prisoners. Conditions will also vary depending on whether people are detained in a modern prison or a local police station.

Many of the problems relate to general living conditions. The National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) operates a service for the ex-detainees that provides basic medical and psychological care to people once they are released. They report that cramped cells, unhygienic environments and inadequate food of poor quality are common complaints for all detainees.

While detainees often complain about the lack of privacy in open cells, all detainees report a preference for communal cells where some form of 'normal' inter-personal relations can be maintained. There is lack of privacy and tension in long term incarceration with the same people, but at least communal cells provide the warmth and support of human contact.

Generalised complaints of abdominal pains, dizzy spells, back and neck aches, anxiety and depression are often reported on release. A pervading anxiety for many women came from the constant threat of torture, even for those who were not themselves interrogated or tortured. Recurrent

nightmares were common. Psychological counsellors who see distressed ex-detainees report that a disproportionate number of women are seeking this service. Many of these problems are experienced by all detainees; but many problems specific to women have been reported.

### Sanitation

Women tend to object more than men to dirty cells, broken toilets, bucket toilets, lack of adequate ablution facilities, lack of soap, shampoo, towels. Detainees must usually buy their own toiletry items with the little amount of spending money that they are permitted per week, if indeed they have access to the prison shop with its high prices and few items. Women may be given no sanitary towels when menstruating, or perhaps only three per women per period. Bedding may not be changed regularly, and often sheets are not provided at all. These conditions will vary from prison to prison.

### Diet

All detainees complain about the quality of food in prison. Breakfast may consist of weak tea or coffee with bread; lunch may be pap\* and soya or pap with tea or coffee and bread, sometimes with jam; supper may consist of some type of meat (not always) with cabbage or in a watery stew. Once a week there may

\* maize meal porridge



be fish or eggs, sometimes with an apple on Sundays. Supper may often be given before 4pm, with nothing until 7am the next day. If detainees or prisoners have the money and access to the prison shop, they may supplement their prison fare but depending on the day that purchases are allowed, the tinned food is often reported as having gone off, and fresh fruit and vegetables are not available.

Some women in prison have reported special dietary problems which are exacerbated because of the poor diet and lack of proper treatment. In the 18 months before Trish Hannekom was released from prison, she developed a severe allergy to many types of food. Her diet was not supplemented; the items that she could not eat were simply removed. She became ill and her weight dropped to 42 kilos before her diet was changed. Her fellow prisoners were not permitted to share their food with her.

### **Privileges**

Depending on the nature of detention and the location, exercise may consist of anything from ten minutes per day to several hours. The only facility may be a communal concrete court yard, and several women have reported problems from trying to jog or exercise on concrete.

Study privileges and newspapers must be fought for, both for awaiting trial prisoners and detainees. Those held in solitary confinement under security legislation (The Internal Security Act) have no access to books, newspapers, letters, study privileges, or any contact with the 'outside world'.

### **Pregnancy**

In some cases women are pregnant when they are first detained. If the women do not miscarry, they must carry their pregnancy to term, often under intolerable conditions.

The medical attention they receive, if any, is poor. Women have been beaten and tortured while already in poor health resulting from pregnancy without adequate care, food, medical attention, and exercise. Women have had to give birth under prison conditions. When they have not been released, they must either try to care for their infants under the same bad conditions, or be separated from their infants at a time when the health of the mother and child depend on their being together. Often for these young women, little more than children themselves, this is their first experience of childbirth, with which they must cope alone and without the support and comfort of family and friends.

Miscarriages are common among women who are detained while pregnant. They may miscarry as a result of assault, torture, lack of medical care, or the stress of detention. Little medical attention is available and hospitalisation is not common, so routine checks for infection and other side-effects are not done.

Recently, the press reported a case of a politically active grandmother whose daughter gave birth while in detention. The authorities offered to release the baby to her care but she refused on the grounds that the infant needed the care that only a mother could provide, whether in prison or not.

These are some of the cases of pregnant women in detention which were reported to the DPSC in past months:

- A 27 year old woman, four months pregnant, was taken to a police station, stripped naked to the waist and assaulted and tortured, while a wet sack was placed over her head.
- A young woman, detained when three months pregnant, was kept in detention until almost nine months pregnant. She was interrogated with hooding and electric shocks.

- A 20 year old woman, detained for three weeks while eight months pregnant, was given inadequate medical treatment while in detention.
- A 20 year old woman from Bhongolethu, detained when seven months pregnant, was held for a month in a cell with 41 others. She only had wet blankets on a cement floor to sleep on. No special care was given, and she was only examined once by a doctor. Her diet was very poor – porridge at 7am, bread and soft drink at 12.30, and soup with cabbage and a piece of meat at 4pm.
- A woman shared a cell with 17 others, one of 33 women in two cells. Some only had mattresses on the floor – there were no beds. In that time, two women suffered miscarriages without any hospitalisation, and it was difficult to see the district surgeon.
- A 24 year old woman had a miscarriage in prison and was taken to hospital for treatment, then immediately returned to her cell.
- An 18 year old woman was detained and interrogated when five months pregnant. When her cellmates demanded her release, all were teargassed in the cell. She became quite ill from this and was hospitalised for a time. She gave birth in the prison hospital but was not allowed to receive clothes for the baby, or see any family visitors. She was returned to prison with her baby. After the baby became ill and was hospitalised, she was released with a restriction order.
- A 21 year old woman from Munsieville was released shortly before the birth of her child, after six months in detention. She, too, was released with a restriction order.

#### MOTHERS SAY:

**'I went to the hospital to enquire about my daughter and I was told that she was taken back to the prison. I am shattered by the whole experience because my daughter is still young and this is her first child.'**

**'She got caught in the teargas and her face and eyes were badly swollen. I was terribly worried and fearful that she would lose the baby.'**

#### POLICE SAY:

**'All detainees in police cells receive adequate medical attention and where they are in late pregnancy they are usually transferred to a prison with in-house medical facilities.'**

(Spokesman for the police public relations directorate)

### Infants

One aspect of children in detention is the detention of very young children and the subjecting of children, often female children, to assault, torture and isolation. But the issue of detention of children also affects women. Women who have given birth in detention have had to either keep their infants with them under appalling conditions, or have their children taken away from them. Women are separated from their children at home when they are detained, many worrying for weeks or months about who is caring for their children. Children are traumatised and affected by seeing their mothers being detained, or just not knowing or understanding why their mothers have suddenly disappeared.

- Police refused to take the four month old baby of a woman they were detaining, even though the infant was still being breastfed. The baby was left alone in the house with a nine year old sister.

- A two year old child spent eight months in detention with his mother. As his mother was unable to breastfeed him once he became very ill, he received the same diet as the adults – samp, beans, mealie rice, and no milk. Only after all the women in the cells had protested when the child had loose bowels, was vomiting and had grown inert, did the prison officials finally send him to hospital. Following this report the South African Prison Services wrote to the Johannesburg *Weekly Mail* complaining of inaccuracy, saying the child had been regularly examined by doctors and that the mother never complained about his health. They stated that it was their policy to allow infants dependent on breastfeeding to be admitted with their mothers and to accommodate them at state expense.

- A set of nine month old twins and their two year old sister were 'orphaned' after the sudden detention of their mother. Not only does this affect the children, but it causes enormous stress to the mother, who has no information about her children.

- One woman had a 10 month old child with her in solitary confinement.

### **Assault and torture**

Allegations of assault and torture in detention are not uncommon. It would appear that young women and girls are often assaulted. Intense pressure, often physical, is placed on detainees to become informers, state witnesses or to confess to 'crimes' they have not committed. Torture is used to elicit such actions especially from young and vulnerable detainees.

- A 15 year old girl was assaulted when arrested and had to spend three days in hospital. When her mother visited her in prison, she saw sjambok\* marks on her neck and shoulders.

- A 16 year old girl was interrogated with torture and electric shock. She refused to become a state witness

and an informer and was locked in a mortuary for 30 minutes.

- A 16 year old girl during interrogation, was taken outside, stripped, had water poured over her, and was denied food for the first 16 hours of detention.

- A 15 year old girl was held in solitary confinement. Tear gas was poured into her cell while she was asleep. She suffered a swollen face and pain in her stomach and chest.

- A young female child was arrested with seven others and charged with arson. They were forced to sign statements with unknown contents at the charge office where they were assaulted. Her mother said she had whip marks all over her body.

- A middle-aged woman was assaulted while being detained. After being released, she was refused the right to lay a charge. She was badly bruised, had blood in her urine, a swollen face and loose teeth.

- A 15 year old girl was tortured with electric shock by police and administration board officials.

- A 14 year old girl was detained and beaten for three hours with a sjambok. No medical treatment resulted in bad scarring.

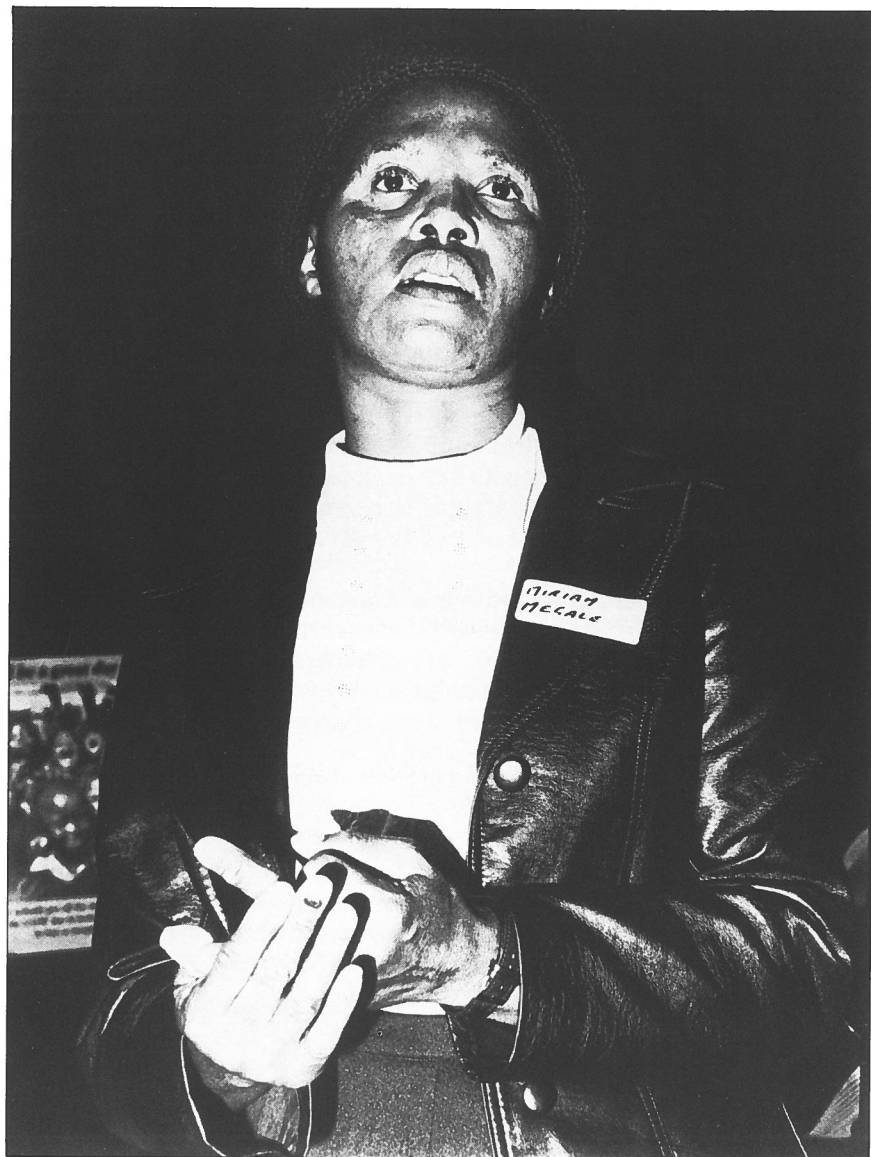
- A 16 year old girl was detained and beaten; police held her down while she was being given electric shocks.

### **Sexual assault**

While it may be common knowledge that women have been sexually assaulted in prisons, in police stations, in security force vehicles and in their homes, women are afraid to talk about these assaults. They believe they may be threatened with reprisals or even death if they do so. Allegations of sexual assault do not differ from other forms of assault and torture in detention in the sense that there are often no witnesses and people are warned not to talk.

\* rawhide whip

**Miriam Mogale, a Kagiso mother, tells of her two young children in detention as the 'Free the Children' campaign is launched.**



One common occurrence for women in detention is the sexual assault of stripping and body searches. Body searches and vaginal examinations are performed on women, apparently for no reason but that of harassment. Aside from the humiliation and embarrassment caused to women, infection and other complaints can result from such treatment.

- A group of 18 year old girls was kept in solitary confinement for three months, subjected to daily stripping and 'body searches'.
- The Sowetan reported that a 21 year old woman laid a charge against a policeman after she was allegedly forced to have sex with him inside the barracks of Moroka Police Station in Soweto, after being picked up with 12 other people for 'drinking liquor in a shebeen'. 'He said if I went with him he would drop the charge against me. I was scared that he would hit me again, and so I could not refuse', the woman said in her affidavit.
- A municipal policeman and four others smothered a woman with a plastic bag, ordered her to strip, pulled her breasts, forced her to have intercourse with another prisoner, and forced a baton into her while she was held down spreadeagled. When she was released the next day, she was warned by the policemen that if she laid a complaint, she would be 'necklaced'.\*

### **Family anguish**

Mothers, fathers and wives of emergency detainees have told of their anguish at being removed from their loved ones. One woman told of the effect on her children of being separated from their father, as 'totally disastrous' ... 'My children miss a father figure in their lives.'

Another women said, 'Until it actually

touches you, you don't realise how painful it is. A part of you is gone, completely vanished. The experience completely changes what comes before and what comes after.'

Families have had to cope with their emotional anger, helplessness and despair at the detention of loved ones. Families have been torn apart, and must learn to deal with the bureaucracy of the system that will hopefully allow them access to see their family members. Many women have had their husbands, sons, daughters in detention, killed, maimed, or leave the country. Mothers of white detainees speak of their awareness that they have had a privileged position in obtaining access to their detained family members, their ability to afford legal help and access to international pressure.

Even when access is permitted, transportation for the wives, mothers and sisters to prison is difficult. The prisons are often far away from their homes, transportation is expensive, and women are working to try to support their families, or busy taking care of other children and family members. The financial burden of caring for the rest of the family, and of trying to purchase permissible items for detainees, often falls to the women. Women must learn to cope with the bureaucracy of the prison system.

One parent said: 'After we learned what had happened to my son, that he had been detained, it was six months before we could see him. I didn't understand what they thought that he had done wrong. We made three applications to visit him and went many times to the prison to try and see him. Finally, they let us see him and take him clothes. Then we learned that he had gone on a hunger strike to make them let him see his family'.

\* burned in a tyre filled with petrol



## A DETAINEE'S CRY FOR HELP

### DEBORAH JOSEPHINE

### MARAKALLA

Deborah is 23 years old and has two children. She will probably never have children again. She was detained under the State of Emergency regulations while at work at the Tembisa Black Sash Advice Office on 7 July 1986.

Deborah, a member of the Tembisa Detainees' Support Committee, was pregnant at the time of her detention. Less than a fortnight later, she suffered a miscarriage and had to be taken to hospital. She told her lawyer what happened:

'I was at Johannesburg General Hospital from 24 to 31 July. I was plus or minus three months pregnant but I lost the baby because it was inside my fallopian tube and the tube burst ... I underwent an operation and the fallopian tube was cut out meaning that I'm left with one fallopian tube'.

Deborah's friends and family say doctors have told her she will be unable to have children again and that she is lucky to be alive. 'She nearly died during the miscarriage', one said. 'She was alone in her cell, and cried out for help. No one heard her, it seems, so no one could help her.' She was only helped when it was too late, they say when the baby was already dead.

The hardship for Deborah's children goes back several weeks before her detention; she had not slept at home for some weeks, as she heard the police were looking for her. 'They didn't like the work she was doing at the advice office', a family member said. 'They don't like anyone who speaks for themselves. They think locking them up will keep them quiet.'

Deborah's family say this is one of the things they have learnt from her detention. They also learnt

how important it is for family and friends to support people in detention, by visiting them and sending letters. 'It makes them feel strong if they can have contact', one family member said. 'They need our support and we must give it to them.'

She signed a sworn statement saying she had undergone surgery while in detention, and that her health is suffering as she has asthma, palpitations and tension headaches. Deborah has since been released, but was served with orders restricting her movements and activities. She can't return to her work at the advice office.

# 4

## THREE WOMEN SPEAK

### A LETTER FROM PRISON

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE are held in South African prisons having been convicted on the widely-used charge of public violence. Two 19 year old women were sentenced to Pollsmoor Prison with the 'Wynberg Seven' in Cape Town. One of them wrote from prison.

#### VENETIA DE KLERK

"Sitting here in the sewing room beside the window, the direct sunshine slowly warms up my whole body for I began feeling cold all over when I started sewing seams and replacing lost buttons. Every stitch I sew reminds me of home! Thoughts of my parents, my sisters Lydia and Jenny, also my brothers Dereck and Eddie, and of course my nephew Kurt, who lives with us. Eddie will be celebrating his sixteenth birthday on 9 September. I wish I could be there with them all!

I can still remember my sixteenth birthday. Daddy was so proud of me – his 'little baby girl' he used to call me. Now, three years later, I find myself here in Pollsmoor Prison.

Because I studied needlework as a subject at high school up to Standard Ten, the wardress gave me the job of seamstress. It is quite a job with all the work to be done. As I sit here my mind flows back to the past. Now and then tears well in my eyes.

I am thinking now of that beautiful green frock mummy made for me when I was five years old.

It had lots of frills and ribbons. Everyone in the hall said I looked like a doll! That night I won first prize in the Junior Ballroom competition. I wonder what has happened to that little partner who danced so light-footed with me? I suppose he won't believe it if he could see what has happened to me now.

Then I ran in the Western Province school sports annual races. How proud it made me feel when I wore that first prize blue badge! Until recently I used to work at weekends for a supermarket to earn my own pocket money to buy some sewing material for the beautiful skirts I would make for myself. My girlfriends were a little bit envious because of all those beautiful skirts. I can also remember doing the weekly shopping and helped mummy with her housework. She always bought me a slab of chocolate then because she knew I couldn't resist it.

Evenings at home: Daddy and Dereck always came home at five o'clock. They worked very hard as my father owns a busy building contractor's business. Every night after they had showered we would all sit around the table enjoying the evening meal. Afterwards we would all get set for a game of snooker in the front room which Daddy had set aside for our recreation, just for his family to relax and to be together. I won most games and it often ended with Eddie calling me a cheat!

Sometimes I feel that I just want to scream at someone as I sit here and think back on the normal life

**The pain of loss.  
Detention, exile,  
death, have all come to  
haunt the families of  
those who oppose  
apartheid.  
Bereaved mother Sylvia  
Jele put her grief aside  
and worked to help  
families of other  
detainees. Her son,  
Sicelo, was detained,  
tortured and later  
murdered.**



I had led until now. I know that I've done nothing wrong. What am I doing in this place? I just want to go home but I know my cries will fall on deaf ears. The first two months have passed quickly. We were trying to adjust to this foreign environment and now we are falling into the prison pattern as all other prisoners have to.

How did all this come about? I clearly remember that day two years ago on the 15 October 1985. At that time there was an unrest in all our schools. Everyone was caught up in the situation. That particular afternoon I decided to go with some of my schoolfriends to Wynberg. I felt a little worried as Daddy's rules were that none of us were to go about after school. We had to come straight home! But I was sure that he would make an exception this time.

As we arrived in Batts Road there were police roaming around in their casspirs. We ignored them and went to a schoolfriend who was living nearby. Then there was this loud knocking on the door and in came a policeman. He marched us all out into the street and before we could say anything or argue about our innocence we found ourselves loaded into a police van and driven to the Wynberg Police station. I could feel my heart thumping in my chest!

We arrived there in an angry and shocked state. After a while I heard that our parents had arrived at the police station and had expressed their anger and concern for their children. My parents had arrived and were very worried. The next day we were released into our parents' care. I remember running to Daddy and cried while telling him that I had done nothing wrong. I know that my parents believed me. But we had been forced to stay overnight in the Wynberg Court cells!

From then on the nightmare began. The case dragged on for two years and everyone was shocked when they heard that we were to start a one year

prison sentence at Pollsmoor Prison starting from 8 June 1987.

Soon the wardress will come and collect my completed work! She never looks directly at me and speaks very little, almost as if I am not here. I look forward to the afternoon because at 4.30 I can go back to my cell and study. I've received a B-plus for my biology assignment. I find it easier to study as it keeps my mind occupied from this soul-destroying place.

I know the people out there are with us. I saw it at the last public meeting, which was held on Sunday 7 June 1987. That was the day before we had to report to Pollsmoor Prison. The meeting was arranged by the Wynberg Crisis Centre. It was at that meeting that my Daddy told a huge audience that he would stand by us and give us all his support.

After his speech I felt like throwing my arms around him for I never knew that he would have had the courage. As it was Sunday we left immediately after the meeting to go to a church service at the Heathfield Methodist Church which was conducted by Reverend Simons. In the sanctuary of the Church it made me feel good and I held Mummy's hand as we walked towards the pew.

As a family we knelt before the altar for our communion before the other members of the congregation. The Rev. Simons told the congregation about my plight in that I was the teenage girl of the 'Wynberg Seven' that must go to prison the next day. After a long silence they prayed for me and many began to weep. I saw a man right in front of me wipe his eyes openly. As we left the service the people held or shook my hand saying: 'God will go with you tomorrow, my girl.'

When we arrived at home we moved around the house speaking very little. I remember going to my room and packing and unpacking my case. Mummy came into my room and just looking at me

broke down and cried her heart out. Later when it became apparent that no one was going to sleep that night, daddy sent for the family doctor who gave us sedatives to make us sleep.

The day of my leaving dawned all too soon. I bathed and did my hair just like someone going to a party! My little nephew, Kurt, sat outside in the car and I could see that he did not really understand what was happening.

The Monday morning we gathered at the home of Mr and Mrs Enous in Wynberg before leaving for Pollsmoor. After prayers and speeches we left and all the way to Pollsmoor, as Daddy drove, I sat in the back of the car with my brother Eddie. He held me tightly in his arms while I just cried softly all the way. He tried to pacify me, saying: 'Don't cry Nercia, don't cry. You have to be strong. Everything is going to be alright.'

We arrived at Pollsmoor Prison at noon. A large crowd of people had come to show their solidarity with the 'Wynberg Seven'. Every where people stood crying because they had become part of these tragic circumstances. A police helicopter whined uncaringly above them, describing constricting circular patterns like a noose. Police guarded the entrance to the prison with vicious leashed dogs.

The crowd softly sang freedom songs and after my family said goodbye, I cried when the huge gates shut me in. Mummy whispered that she would be bringing me a large chocolate slab on her first visit.

This week my parents have had their 30-minute visit. They have had to choose who would see me as only one visitor per visit is allowed. Daddy always lets Mummy come to see me while he waits outside. I know that he cannot bear to see me like this!

Soon the Christmas visit will be coming up. I know it will be a sad day for all our family. On her last

visit Mummy expressed concern at my apparent loss of weight and said to me:

'I've brought you two slabs of chocolate but they refused to take it. Now I must take it back home again.' 'Give it to Kurt. I don't know what chocolate tastes like anymore,' I told her. We stared into each other's eyes as the 30-minute visit was over leaving so much unsaid."

(Venetia was released in 1988.)

## A WIFE'S PAIN

"My husband was detained the morning the State of Emergency was declared. We had been expecting the worst and I should have been prepared for what was to come. Yet, when it happened, I was shocked, numbed and angry. I was filled with a sense of insecurity and fear. I was alone with a small baby. How would I be able to cope by myself? But worst of all, I had no idea where my husband was being held.

At first it was hard to get on with the normal business of living: of going to work, cooking meals and coping with our small baby, of writing letters to find out where my husband was being held. When, eventually, I learned where he was it was somehow comforting to think of him in some place somewhere. He had not simply disappeared into the night, never to return. Yet I was still filled with fear. What could they be doing to him? I had heard so many stories.

To begin with, I felt immobilised. But there were a lot of practical things to do such as contacting the DPSC, seeing lawyers and taking clothes and money to my husband once I knew where he was. All this activity gave me a sense of being in control of my life again. It made me feel I was fighting back for my husband and our baby in some small way, no matter how small.

Our family was fortunate because it did not

suffer many of the tensions that are the common experience of other families in this situation. For many families, detention can mean the loss of a breadwinner. There is the rent to be paid and food to be bought. There is the fear that the detainee will lose his/her job, or parents' worry whether their child will be able to continue with school. Often the family is so stressed that its members cannot give one another support. Young children may become clingy, demanding or aggressive.

In the midst of everything, there was always a bright moment. A visit to my husband, an article in the newspaper about someone released after a court ruling that the detention was unlawful. But the waiting continued.

It was important for me to clarify my own feelings about my husband's political involvement. It is normal at times like these to feel that the price one is being asked to pay is too great; to doubt one's own stand. When I confronted this fully I said to myself: 'I believe in the justness of your cause. I respect what you believe in, for it is also my cause.' This gave me strength. It helped me accept what I was feeling. It helped me to cope with my depression and doubts. If I was feeling down I talked to my friends. I was not afraid to ask for help and support if I needed it. It was also important for me to keep in touch with others who were in the same situation.

Wherever I went I carried my candle of hope. Sometimes my little flame flickered brightly. At other times it was not so bright. My candle of hope helped me to believe that one day justice will prevail. It gave me an awareness that we are walking on a great road to a new South Africa where there will be peace and friendship for all.

Imagine my joy when our family was reunited six weeks later after my husband was first detained. He was thrilled to see his baby again."

## A MOTHER'S CRY

### **SYLVIA JELE**

Sicelo Dhlomo was the only child of Sylvia Jele. Sicelo, an 18 year old volunteer worker at the DPSC, was shot in the head at a field near his mother's house murdered by unknown assailants in January of this year. Sicelo's name joins the growing list of those whose murders remain 'unsolved' by the police: Goniwe, Mxenge, Calata, Ribiero and many others – all of them opponents of apartheid.

Sicelo had been detained for five months under the 1986 State of Emergency, and told the world in an interview in the CBS television documentary *Children of Apartheid* that he had been assaulted and tortured during his detention. He had been acquitted on a charge of murder following his detention. Less than a week before the day he was killed, Sicelo had been taken from the DPSC office, detained for several hours and questioned about his interview with CBS.

Sylvia gave evidence before a tribunal hearing in Washington in 1987, on the effects of detention on children. She spoke about what it is to live as the mother of a young activist and to live with her child in detention and in constant danger.

As a mother, she became convinced, through the experiences of her son, that she must also be in a position to say and do something to liberate her community. She was not in a position to join any organisation at the time, due to the constant police harassment of her son but she was very eager to join women's organisations like FEDTRAW. She has now joined the DPSC, and when asked why, replied 'Because of the harassment of my child, I must be part and parcel of the struggle.' Sicelo once said that he became involved in the 'struggle for freedom' because 'I am fighting not only for my rights, but for the rights of others, for my parents who are not respected as





people. I am going to fight for my people, my rights and for a democratic South Africa. I may have to die to achieve this.'

The prophetic words of this young activist came true: and a concerned and loving mother is now a grieving and angry mother, mourning her terrible loss. As one of the speakers at Sicelo's memorial service stated: 'The spear of our young and brave comrade has now fallen, who will pick up the spear? It is a challenge to all of us.'

Sylvia now lives with the agony of having lost her bright and committed son in such a brutal and vicious way. Sylvia's loss and her courage to continue to speak out and to work in the struggle is a painful tribute to the mothers of South Africa.

**Sicelo Dhlomo, a young student leader, was detained and assaulted in detention. He told his story on world television, became a voluntary worker in the detainees' support office, and was murdered in January 1988 at the age of 18.**

At least 25,000 people were detained between June 1986 and June 1987. Symbolising the State of Emergency, wives and mothers of detainees hold candles ringed with barbed wire at a Mass held by the Catholic bishops at Soshanguve township.



# 5

## DETENTION: THE FACTS

THERE ARE FOUR main types of detention in South Africa. People are incarcerated

- under State of Emergency regulations
- under security legislation
- awaiting trial or on trial, without bail
- as convicted prisoners.

All statistics must be considered to be only estimates. Information is very difficult to obtain from the police and the prison service. The following statistics have been derived from the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) files of names of people who have been held under emergency regulations or other legislation. The records of the DPSC are by no means comprehensive, but they provide a basis for sound estimates of the extent and pattern of detentions.

### STATE OF EMERGENCY DETENTION

These statistics are derived from the DPSC records of people known to have been held under the Emergency. In many cases, the gender of a detainee is not given and could not be deduced from the name given. Those detainees were assumed to be male for the purpose of the DPSC statistics. The figure of 12.2% of detainees who are known to be women is used, but the real proportion is likely to be considerably higher. If we use this percentage and a conservative estimate

of 25,000 people detained between June 1986 and June 1987, the total number of women detained could be estimated to be at least 3,050. It seems that this figure of 12% has been consistent throughout the State of Emergency.

While no official figures have been given, this percentage does tally with the figure of 12.5% for female children held given by the police in April 1987. According to the police, 12.5% of the children held on 15 April 1987 were female. The total number was 1,424 children aged from 12 to 18 years. It is known that 107 women were re-detained in June 1987 while they were already in detention; again, the actual number of all the people detained is not known.

In the June 1987-June 1988 period, the total number of women detained was 204, being 5.2% of the Emergency detentions recorded.

### DETENTION UNDER SECURITY LEGISLATION

Despite the existence of the State of Emergency, detentions under 'normal' security legislation have also increased.

When the police release a figure of the numbers of people detained under security laws, they often do not release the names of those held. Therefore it is not possible to know how many women are detained under this legislation. It is also not

possible to reconcile the overall number of detentions known to the DPSC with the official information received. All DPSC estimates must be considered to be conservative. The following data will give an overall impression of the use of security legislation in the detention of women. The recent levels of security detainees are the highest for many years and reflect the degree of resistance and repression that have characterised the past three years.

### **Section 28 of the Internal Security Act**

This section provides for indefinite 'preventative' detention and is primarily used to remove political opponents from the community for lengthy periods. However, since 1984, when 28 people were known to be detained under this section, its use has largely fallen away as a result of successful court challenges and heavy criticism. Only eight people were held under this section in 1985, none in 1986 and none in the first half of 1987.

### **Section 29 of the Internal Security Act**

More than half of the detentions under security legislation have occurred under this section. Section 29 allows for the indefinite detention of a person in solitary confinement with no access to legal counsel, family visits, contact with other detainees, indeed, no access to any of the other hard-won 'rights' permitted to detainees.

According to the legislation this section is supposed to be used to hold people in detention for the purposes of interrogation, and at least two recent court decisions have released Section 29 detainees based on the fact that they had never been questioned. It is under this section, where detainees are held for long periods completely incommunicado, that many allegations of torture and abuse are found. Under this section, detainees are the most vulnerable, physically

and mentally. Many strong women have survived under this section without being broken.

While the Emergency Regulations have at times lessened the use of Section 29, there is an annual overall increase in these detentions. Often people detained under Emergency Regulations have been transferred to Section 29. They are held for long periods of time and then charged with some offence or subpoenaed to give evidence in trials. Many Section 29 detainees have now been held for more than one year in solitary confinement. Women have, on average, made up 8% of known persons detained under Section 29.

#### **1984**

In 1984, 7% of the 280 people known to have been detained under this section were women. One was Theresa Ramashamola, now awaiting execution as one of the Sharpeville Six. Many of these women were in detention for months. Marilia Nhlabantsi gave birth in prison under Section 29. For Bessie Fihla from Soweto, branch treasurer of the since banned COSAS (Congress of South African Students), it was the first of many detentions.

#### **1985**

In 1985, 11% of the known 320 people held under Section 29 were women. The Minister of Law and Order published a figure of 406, leaving a gap of 86 people about whom nothing was known. During the crackdown on UDF leadership, many were detained under this section rather than the Emergency.

A number of these were women, including Albertina Sisulu, Amanda Kwadi, Nosiswe Madlala, Ntombazana Botha, Lucile Meyer and Miranda Qwanyashe. The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) chairperson from the Eastern Cape, Janet Cherry, was held under Section 29. She was then held under the 1986/1987 State of Emergency for almost one year. The

# Mother's concern over son's detention

A CAPE Town mother has expressed fears for her detained son's health after seeing him briefly in hospital last week.

Andrian Kathleen Forbes of Wynberg said she saw her son, Ashley, for less than five minutes at Grootte Schuur Hospital last Wednesday.

"I asked the policeman if I could see Ashley and he refused. I just stood there because it was the first time in 16 months that I felt so close to Ashley," Forbes said.

She did however, get to see Ashley but did not get enough time to speak to him. It all

happened within four minutes.

"What struck me was that Ashley was showing no emotion or reflexes. He was just lying there.

"I was excited at seeing Ashley that night. When I was alone, I realised I did not really see Ashley. Ashley is always boisterous and bouncy. I saw someone who was broken, with no reaction. He smiled faintly and wiped his head.

"I'm extremely worried. I fear for Ashley's sanity and his life," said Forbes.

## Militant District Six granny out to fight Group Areas

A 60-year-old Cape granny, one of the people who led the resistance against forced removals from District Six in the '70s, wants to form a new organisation to help people affected by the Group Areas Act.

Naz Ebrahim, former chairman of the District Six Ratepayers Association and current vice-chairman of the Thornhill Association, said many people

## 'They didn't have to die'

KWAMASHU residents say the recent violence in the Durban township, which left seven youths dead, could have been averted if residents were not forced to bury their dead in "politically hostile areas".

The cycle of violence began on March 14 when armed youths from Lindelani disrupted the funeral of Simon Mdalose, kwaMashu Youth League, in Ntuzuma cemetery.

and residents have to travel through Lindelani to the Ntuzuma cemetery.

The residents say that travelling through Lindelani often leads to confrontations with anti-UDF factions.

New kwaMashu township manager Edwin Martins confirmed yesterday that complaints had been received from "residents who want to bury their people in peace".

But he said ... could be

## Dead detainee's mom challenges the police

THE NEW NATION

## Fedsaw – the giant is coming alive again

Western Cape president Dorothy Zihlangu, a former ANC Women's League member and a stalwart in the federation in the '60s, told the hundreds of people at the launch: "It won't help us to sit in sorrow thinking there is nothing we can do. We know Botha is not sleeping."

She called on all the women in the region to join Fedsaw "so that we can stand up like the 20 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in the '50s to confront Strydom over pass laws.

## Khayelitsha residents sue

FIVE Khayelitsha families whose homes were destroyed by Witdoek vigilantes in December are to lay claims for damages which could amount to thousands of rands.

The Cape Town Supreme Court ordered the vigilantes to rebuild the houses earlier this year, but the order was invalidated when the residents rebuilt their own houses.

A lawyer acting for the applicants told the NEW NATION that the residents would bring claims for damages based on the cost of rebuilding and replacing possessions which were destroyed.

two youngest held were Kwa Thema schoolgirls Joan Nontanda Gqueba, aged 14, and Monica Thabethe, aged 16, held in solitary confinement for 77 days before being released without charge.

### **1986**

The DPSC knew of 333 detentions under Section 29 in 1986, of whom 28 (8.5%) were women. After the new State of Emergency was declared, the rate of Section 29 detentions actually rose in spite of the thousands of people being detained under the Emergency. Many of the most dedicated women were held under the Emergency, then transferred to Section 29, remaining in solitary confinement for over one year. Sister Bernard Ncube of Kagiso was held for more than one year before being released on bail after being charged in 1987 with subversion and sedition. When it finally came to court, the case against Sister Bernard was dismissed. Phinda Molefe, from Alexandra, was detained for several months and released without charge. She is the mother of a small child and her husband is the UDF general secretary, Popo Molefe, who is one of the three Delmas treason trialists who have not been released on bail.

At least two of the women held under Section 29 in 1986 were charged, tried and subsequently sentenced. Marion Sparg was sentenced to 25 years for treason and arson. In sentencing, the judge found the fact that she was white was an aggravating factor and sentenced her more heavily because of that. Greta Applegren was sentenced in 1987 to 21 months.

### **1987**

The number of people held under Section 29 in 1987 was 394. Of these 69 (17.5%) were women – the highest percentage of women yet recorded. Those held the longest were Sister Bernard Ncube, Nomvula Mokonyane, Johanna Makoao, Maria Letshaba, all

from Kagiso, who spent most of 1987 under Section 29 detention. Johanna Makoao is the only other woman co-accused in Sister Bernard's trial. Dorothy Nyembe, in her 60s, was released in 1984 after spending 10 years on Robben Island, and was detained in 1987 under Section 29 in Durban.

### **Section 31 of the Internal Security Act**

This section provides for the detention of potential state witnesses. It is a particularly pernicious section, and much mental anguish is associated with it. Because the names are always shrouded in secrecy, only a few are ever known.

Many of those who are detained under this section do not agree to give evidence for the State against other detainees, and when they are eventually brought to court they are given prison sentences for refusing to testify. In 1984, for instance, 18 people were detained under or transferred to this section. Emma Ntimbani, a teacher, refused to testify and received a 12 month sentence. Rena Mokoena was detained in November 1984 under Section 29, transferred to Section 31, and detained until the end of the 1986 State of Emergency. At least six more known women were transferred to this section.

But in 1986, for example, only 13 people were known out of the 709 detained under this section; five were women.

### **Section 50 of the Internal Security Act**

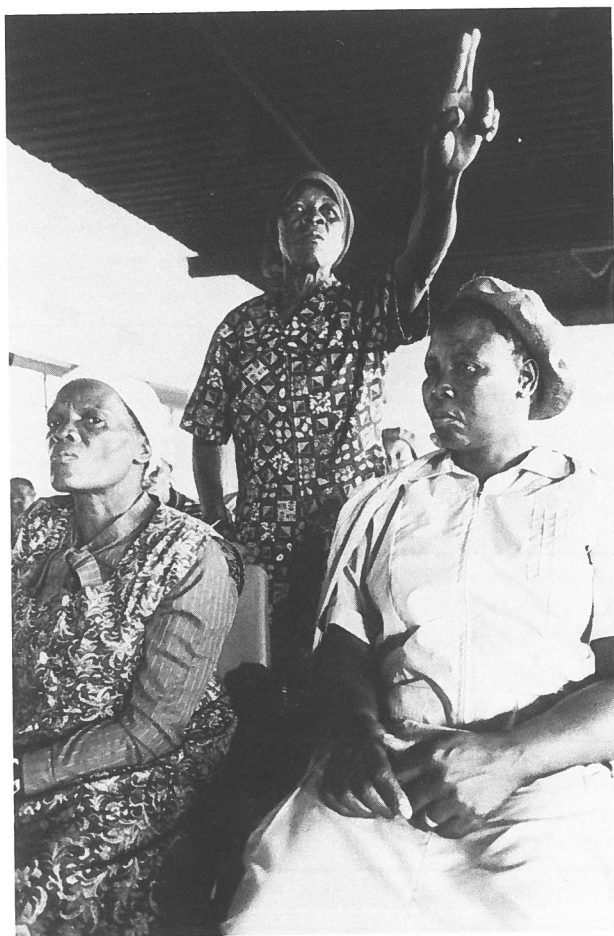
This section provides for short-term (up to 14 days) 'preventative' detention. It is extremely difficult to gather information on the numbers and names of detainees held under this section. In 1984, as a very rough estimate, 72 people were known to be held under Section 50 (ten women); in 1985 the figure rose to 1,924 (250 women); in 1986 at least 3,512 people (500 women) were held under this section,



**Veteran opponent of apartheid  
Dorothy Nyembe spent 10 years in  
jail, was released in 1984 and then  
detained in 1987 under the  
security laws.**



**Women unite to resist apartheid's forced removals. These Mogopa women belong to a community forcibly removed from their land in 1984. Their resistance continues.**



representing 88% of all detentions under the Internal Security Act.

It is noteworthy that of the persons detained under this section, approximately 4% were charged and approximately 0.5% were convicted of any offence. The significance of the extremely high numbers detained under this section show how it was used to provide Emergency-type powers in areas which were not covered by the 1985/86 Emergency Regulations, and in all areas during the three-month period between the two formal States of Emergency. For example, many of the hundreds of people detained in Kagiso were held under this section, as the Emergency had not been declared in that area in the 1985-86 term.

However, this section has not been used since 12 June 1986 because the Emergency Regulations give the authorities the same powers of 'preventative' detention.

## REPRESSION IN THE BANTUSTANS

Information about actual detentions in the 'independent' bantustans (reserves) is very difficult to obtain. The numbers of detentions in the bantustans are many but it is not easy to ascertain the numbers of women. Few women are known to have been detained under security legislation in these areas, although the Transkei recorded the most detentions under the security legislation of any region. Many detentions have also occurred under the Ciskei National Security Act. A human rights group in the Transkei released a report at the end of 1987 detailing extraordinarily high levels of repression, with equally high levels of resistance.

Many of those detained in the Transkei are

still in detention, including several members of parliament detained in the recent political upheavals. Women are most affected in these areas by the attacks on the community as a whole. The arbitrary nature of the detentions is clear. One woman was apparently detained because police were unable to find her husband. Many women have been charged with various offences such as terrorism, harbouring 'terrorists' or the possession of banned publications. A total of 783 people were charged in 41 political trials.

Political trials and legal actions against the minister of police most heavily underline the repression in Transkei. There were 27 court applications seeking relief from detention, assaults in detention or banishment and deportation orders. In one case, detainee Nomonde Matiso is claiming for unlawful detention and assault. Nomonde, a church worker, was apparently so badly tortured in detention that she spent three months in hospital, where she was again allegedly assaulted.

## RESTRICTION ORDERS, BANNINGS AND DEPORTATIONS

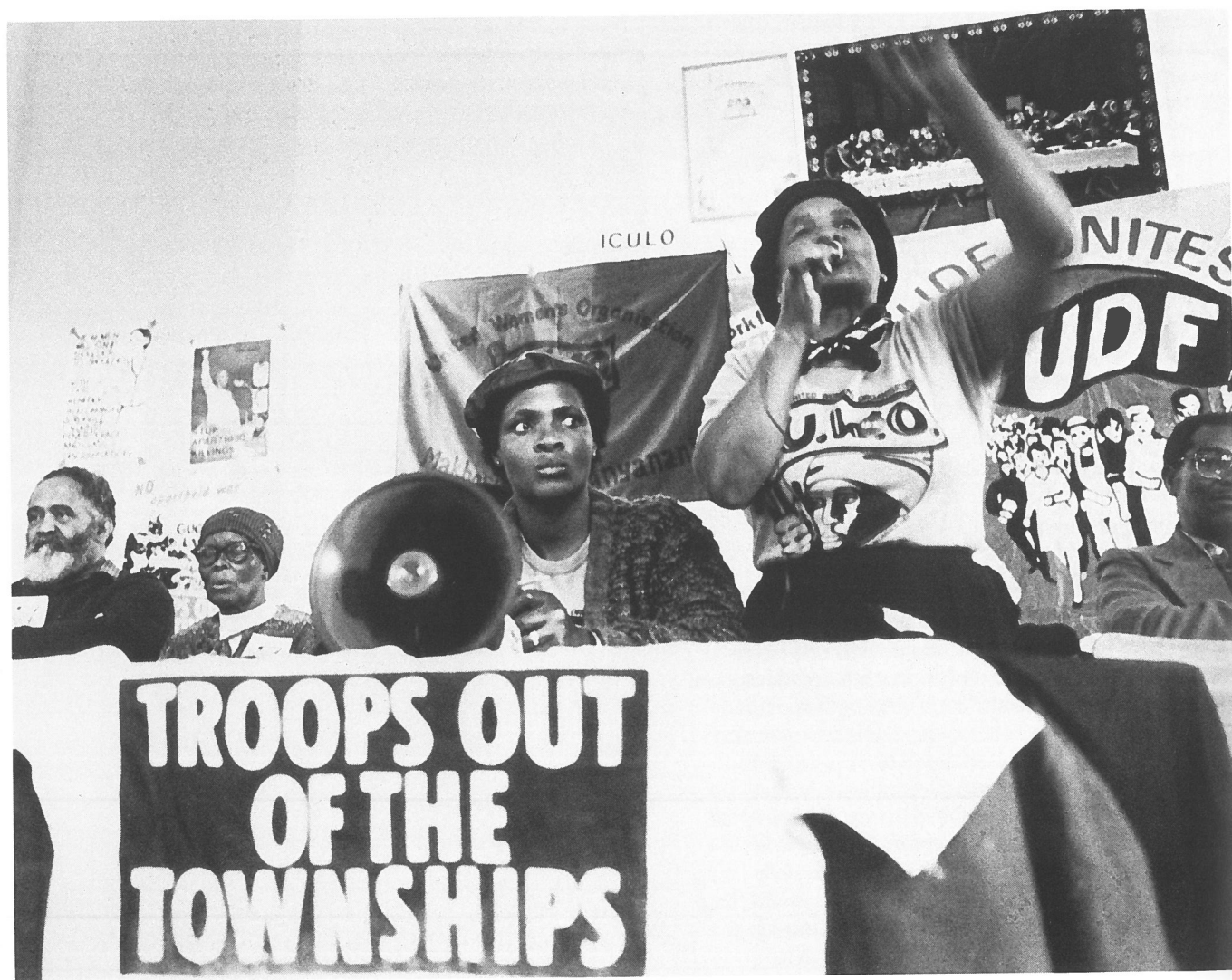
There is an increasing use of Regulation 7(1) of the Emergency Regulations which provides for restriction from political activities or confinement to specified areas when detainees are released. Of the restriction orders served on people in the 1986-87 period, 30 (47%) were women, most of whom were white.

Regulation 7 (1) is used instead of detention for curtailing political involvement. For example, Janet Cherry, Sue Lund and Claire Verbeek were released with restriction orders forbidding them from taking part in activities or organisations. Penelope Mosetle and Dorcas Dikana, who gave birth in

detention, were released with their infants and placed under restriction orders. Deportations have been most commonly used in the bantustan areas. However, Anika van Gylswyk of the Black Sash, a Swedish passport holder, was deported after being released from detention. Chris Bonner, a regional secretary of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union, was detained for two weeks at the beginning of the State of Emergency, and is still appealing against a deportation order.

Banning and banishment orders are used more extensively by the bantustan regimes. For example, in the Transkei, people seen as opponents of the bantustan authorities are restricted to certain areas, banished to remote areas, or deported from the bantustan back to South Africa or elsewhere.

Mass-based anti-apartheid campaigns met with wholesale repression from the government. Women from United Democratic Front organisations (below) call for troops to be removed from the black townships where they were used in a bid to end the countrywide schools boycott.



# 6

## POLITICAL TRIALS

### 1985-1987

THE DIFFICULTY OF RECORDING political trials in South Africa is that only the most spectacular ever end up in newspaper reports. We therefore have only been able to record those trials which have come to our attention because the accused were well-known figures or the nature of the charges were such that the press deemed them to be newsworthy. This means that literally thousands of trials have taken place in the last few years which have passed unremarked. It also means that hundreds of women who have appeared in those trials have met a fate known only to their close family and the courts in which they appeared. DPSC records show that the vast majority of the cases referred to here were for offences such as 'public violence'.

The Minister of Law and Order, answering questions in Parliament in 1986, revealed that during the State of Emergency from July 1985 to March 1986 (which covered initially 36 magisterial districts and later 45, but not the whole of South Africa), about 22,000 prosecutions were launched on charges of public violence. Only a handful of these were known to monitoring groups. Lawyers handling such cases report, however, that where such cases are known,

and the accused were represented by counsel, the result was that in the vast majority of cases, the charges were dropped, and of those which went through the legal process, the majority were acquitted.

The year 1985 did, however, mark a high point of women's struggles and demonstrations, which resulted in the prosecution of many women. The State makes extensive use of the courts in order to 'criminalise' their opposition, giving themselves a 'cleaner' image in terms of the number of people detained, and in answer to the call made by many well-meaning but misguided groups for the state to 'charge or release' detainees. The DPSC argued against making this call: the government has a vast armoury of repressive legislation, outlawing activities which in most democratic countries would be regarded as legitimate opposition, so that to call for people to be charged is to lend credibility to an unjust system and could have the outcome of sending innocent people to jail.

Women were prominent in demonstrations in Western Cape in 1985. There is a long history of women's militancy in the squatter camps of this area,

as women struggled to unite their families, divided by the iniquities of the system of influx control. In 1985, 169 women from the New Crossroads squatter camp took part in a demonstration around squatter conditions and were arrested and charged with the offence of illegal gathering. Of these, 89 were found guilty and received suspended sentences.

By far the most high profile trial in 1985 was the treason trial in Pietermaritzburg of the 'UDF 16'. In this trial the most prominent leaders of the UDF were arraigned in an alleged conspiracy to further the aims of the banned African National Congress (ANC) through the structures of the UDF. The trial was very lengthy, with twelve of the accused being released in December 1985, and the remaining four being acquitted at the end of the state's argument. Among the 16 was Albertina Sisulu, one of the three joint presidents of the UDF. She is a stalwart of the women's movement, being a leader of the Federation of South African Women in the 1950s, and more recently of the Federation of Transvaal Women, and the recently re-launched FEDSAW. Albertina has also borne the burden of her husband, an ANC leader, being in life imprisonment; a son, prominent journalist Zwelakhe, in detention and a grandson jailed for terrorism.

The Eastern Cape has long been the heartland of people's struggle, and has produced some of the most remarkable leaders and individuals, such as Ivy Gcina. Among them was outstanding civil rights campaigner, the late Molly Blackburn. She and her colleague, Di Bishop, were harassed too many times to mention, not least through the courts. On one occasion Molly Blackburn, acting on information from a distraught parent about the abuse of arrested schoolchildren at Uitenhage police station, led a group of Black Sash women into the station, and there witnessed a brutal assault on a young detainee. In the ensuing confusion Molly Blackburn and Dr Liz

Thomson accused the officer in charge of the station of being inebriated and were charged with 'crimen injuria'. They were acquitted.

Not long afterwards, Molly Blackburn was killed in a car crash. Molly, her sister Judy Chalmers, and the Bishops were returning from Oudtshoorn where the information they had gathered about repression in the township of Bhongolethu is recorded in *The Last Affidavits*. \*

The end of 1985 saw death sentences passed on Theresa Ramashamola and five others, on charges of murder and subversion. The charges rose out of the events of 3 September 1984 in the Vaal, when a massive popular protest against a rent increase took place in the various townships in that area, such as Sebokeng, Sharpeville, Boipatong, and Zamdela. On that day, a large crowd, marching on the community council offices, was passing the house of a councillor, and called on him to join the march. His response was to open fire on the crowd, whereupon the crowd attacked him, and he was killed. Theresa Ramashamola was among the crowd, and the court found her guilty of having urged people to kill the councillor. The Sharpeville Six, as they are known, are on death row.

The year 1986 opened with a focus on another prominent political figure – Winnie Mandela. For many years, she had been banished to the small Orange Free State town of Brandfort. There, she had built a clinic, and had engaged in community work. She was subjected to enormous harassment, culminating in the petrol bombing of her house. After this, she decided to defy her banning order, and moved back to the family home in Soweto. She was immediately charged with breaking her restrictions. Under immense pressure, both local and

\* Published by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), 1987, Johannesburg



**Albertina Sisulu, a stalwart of the women's movement since the 1950s, became one of three joint presidents of the United Democratic Front and was one of the 16 UDF leaders charged for treason in 1985. Her husband, Walter Sisulu, is a fellow life prisoner of Nelson Mandela. Her son, journalist Zwelakhe, is held under Emergency detention.**



## The South African Youth Congress



# Save the 32 South African patriots

**Make your mark against the murder of our patriots.**

The evil and racist government which rules our country by force also uses its administrative machinery to create conditions for oppression exploitation. Their courts have condemned 32 South African patriots to death for their opposition to apartheid colonialism. These brave men and women of our country come from our youth, women and community organisations.

Together with all of us they have been fighting against the criminal apartheid system for a non-racial democratic society based on the Freedom Charter. On the other hand the South African government is destabilising the Frontline States. Their vigilante bandits, SADF, SAP and Kitskonstabels are killing our people every day. They have killed innumerable patriots in detention.

They have already executed our brave fighters like Vuyisile Mini, Motaung, Moloise, Payi, Zondo and others. Today they are about to hang 32 patriots, including McBride. Their lives can only be saved by united action by all peace-loving and freedom-loving people the world over.

- Sayco demands:
- An end to the hanging of political prisoners and activists.
  - For political, humanitarian and moral reasons, the apartheid regime must not hang the 32 South African patriots presently on "Death Row".
  - The apartheid regime must become a signatory to the Geneva Convention.
  - All those captured activists who had taken up arms against the apartheid regime must be given prisoner-of-war status.

P Mokaba  
SAYCO PRESIDENT

international, the state backed down, and withdrew the charges.

Two of the most dramatic political trials of 1986 were those of Helen Pastoors and Marion Sparg. The former is a Dutch citizen, who was charged with offences including the caching of arms for ANC guerrillas, furthering the aims of that organisation, and treason. She was found guilty, and sentenced to 10 years. She suffered a particularly traumatic detention and interrogation, being held in solitary confinement in John Vorster Square, under constant closed circuit television surveillance. Helen has now been subpoenaed to give evidence in an ANC treason trial against her friend Ismail Ebrahim. Refusal to testify could result in more years being added to her prison sentence.

Marion Sparg, a South African who had worked as a journalist in the Eastern Cape before leaving the country and joining the ANC, was involved in a number of attacks on police stations before being caught. Her activities began in her home town of East London, where a limpet mine exploded in Cambridge police station. Not long afterwards, a blast destroyed part of John Vorster Square, the security police headquarters in Johannesburg, and an unexploded device was found at the Hillbrow Police Station. Shortly after this, Marion was arrested, and put on trial, after which she received a sentence of 25 years.

The charge of possession of banned literature is commonly used against activists when all other ways of harassment have failed. Given the sweeping powers of the State to ban publications, it is not impossible to find such documents in the possession of many South African citizens. A Cape Town woman activist, Shaída Issel, was charged for this offence, though the charges were withdrawn. Also in 1986, Shirley Gunn and Arletta Ngobese were

## **ON DEATH ROW**

### **THERESA RAMASHAMOLA**

**Theresa Ramashamola is the first South African woman to be sentenced to death for political violence. She was convicted along with five young men in December 1985 for 'common purpose' in the death of the deputy mayor of Sharpeville in the Vaal uprising of 1984.**

Theresa, a single woman aged 26 who was working in the kitchen of a roadhouse before her detention, was taken into custody in November 1984. She spent several months in solitary confinement under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act before being charged.

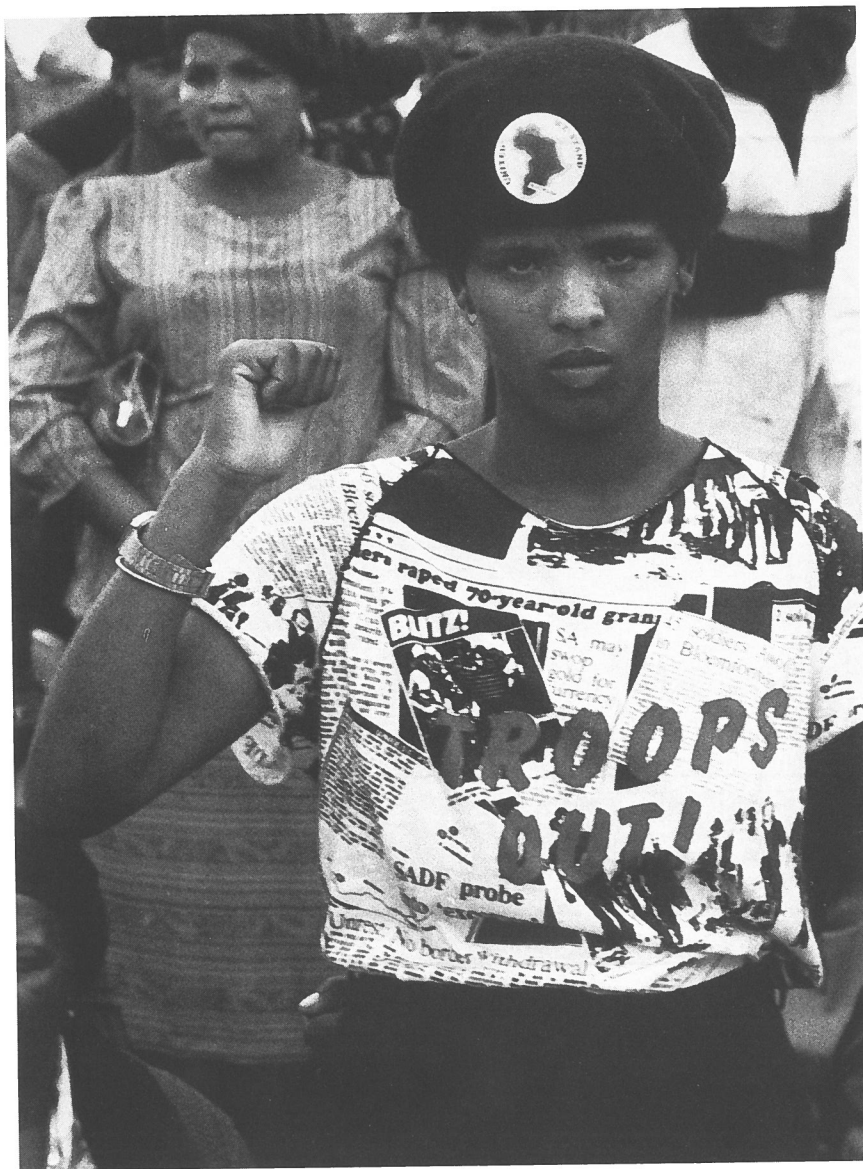
Lawyers say that evidence was submitted to court that Theresa was tortured during her period of solitary confinement. Among other things the court was told of electric shocks being applied to her nipples. She never gave a confession during interrogation, her lawyers say. The court rejected defence submissions that there was a pattern of police torture of the accused.

The judge accepted a confession made by one of Theresa's co-accused. This and in-camera evidence of witnesses largely formed the basis of the conviction and consequent death sentence.

A campaign is being conducted both in South Africa and internationally against the death sentences.

charged with similar offences, but found not guilty.

Perhaps the offence which the state finds most opprobrious is that of furthering the aims of the ANC. People who are obvious sympathisers of that organisation set a very dangerous example to other politically aware individuals in the community, and



Even a T-shirt can be banned under the State of Emergency. This young woman wore an End Conscription Campaign 'troops out' T-shirt at a funeral in the Eastern Cape.

are therefore mercilessly treated, in order to discourage other sympathisers. In June 1986, Elizabeth Erasmus and Fuad Kallie were charged with making an ANC flag which was flown at an ANC funeral. They were acquitted in early 1987. Nontembiso Ndabeni of Port Elizabeth, along with five others were charged in 1986 with furthering the aims of the ANC, as was Brendaline Marks and Vernon Roussouw, of the Cape. Neither case has come to a conclusion yet.

The wave of popular protest which has marked the recent history of South African resistance has kept up its momentum, though taking a lower key in 1987/88. The high visibility of many public protests brought attempts by the police to crush them. A number of trials were launched, involving charges such as arson, public violence, attempted murder, terrorism and subversion.

Many cases arose out of the Vaal resistance to high rents and, although only recently brought to trial, many of the accused have been in detention for very long periods – some well over a year. During 1986, three women were in a group of 13 who were charged as above. They were found not guilty of the terrorism, but were convicted of public violence and given suspended sentences. Also in the Vaal area, Maria Sobekwa and seven others were arraigned on charges of subversion and murder, but were acquitted. Subversion as a charge is often used to attack those who undermine the legitimacy of figures such as councillors.

Eleven people were brought to court in March 1987, charged with murder, though in circumstances which clearly indicate a political motivation. Regrettably, the DPSC knows little about this case, but there are three women and two minors involved. The case is still in progress.

A case involving direct ANC links arose in

Durban in 1986/87. The accused were Robert McBride and Greta Appelgren. The former was alleged to be a trained guerilla, who enlisted the help of Greta Appelgren on a self-chosen mission which he saw as a retaliatory action for a raid into the neighbouring state by South African forces, in which ANC members had been killed. His action took the form of a car bomb, involving loss of life. He has been sentenced to death, while Greta Appelgren received a sentence of 21 months, as she was found to have been unaware of McBride's intentions.

Many of the detainees held for long periods under Emergency Regulations or security legislation have only recently been charged with offences and are in the process of being brought to trial. The plethora of trials throughout the country that have recently resulted in convictions or are now in process are clogging the courts, depleting the limited resources of support organisations, and severely stretching the legal counsel available for trials that by their very nature are political. People have been convicted of and are on trial for treason, terrorism, subversion, sedition, sabotage, possession of banned literature, murder, arson, assault, furthering the aims of banned organisations, public violence, membership of the ANC, intimidation, attending an illegal gathering, contravention of the Police Act, harbouring suspected terrorists, malicious damage to property, kidnapping, publishing subversive statements, refusing to testify, possession of weapons, contravention of emergency regulations, public disturbances, illegal displaying of placards, illegal picketing, incitement, leaving the country illegally, contravention of the Internal Security Act, illegal possession of grenades, distribution of illegal pamphlets, photographing an illegal gathering, receiving military training, illegal strikes, possession of banned T-shirts...

# 7

## WATHINT' ABAFAZI WATHINT' IMBOKOTHO

**You have struck the women,  
you have struck the rock**

THIS FAMOUS SONG of the courage and resistance of South African women was first sung on 9 August 1956. The leaders of FEDSAW were banned, exiled, imprisoned and charged, effectively silencing the organisation.

Three decades later, women's organisations have taken a new form and have survived despite the detention of the officials and members and constant state harassment. Women have organised in the community to resist unjust rents, rising living costs, transport issues, removals, unemployment, the Koornhof Bills, police and army in the townships, unfair work conditions, and the detention of children. In fact, it is often the women in the community who must organise resistance.

We are now entering the third year of living under a State of Emergency. Despite the detentions and repression, women are continuing to struggle

and fight back. The detentions of women and their families have shown that women have the strength to survive, to resist, and to organise. The continuing repression has politicised women as never before.

The detention of women throughout this period of state onslaught is an indication of their participation and effectiveness in mobilising resistance. But despite the achievements of women in the community, women have to fight two struggles. Women have organised in the workplace and have been at the forefront of many militant strikes. But unions have been slow to develop women's programmes and take up issues of importance to women at the bargaining table.

Women's issues, as always, lag behind because their full participation is hampered by responsibilities at home, traditional husbands, and the double shift of work that women must do, and



**A defiant township  
demonstration: women  
young and old have  
been a mainstay of the  
struggle in South  
Africa.**



which is 'never done'. Women's activities in the community are curtailed by restricted time and access. While women have been mobilised in large numbers in the community, it has been against almost insurmountable odds that women's organisations set up to address the problems of women have survived. A rare example of such mobilisation was the women's stayaway organised in Port Alfred in response to rapes in their township.

In the 1980s, women's organisations all over the country began uniting in regions. The membership democratically determined the objectives based on regional conditions and issues. Women were adamant that women's issues be seen as integral to the political issues in the country. The launch of the UDF Women's Congress, and the revived FEDSAW both occurred during 1987, as did the formation of COSATU's women's section. These major national organisations are committed to the basic principles of non-racialism, non-sexism, and democracy and to the development of women's participation in grassroots organisations. And they show that years of living under State of Emergency repression have not succeeded in dulling the spirit of South African women in the struggle against apartheid.

### **FIGHTING SPIRIT**

Two 65 year old women, both grandmothers, were detained for nine months. One of them was undergoing treatment for high blood pressure and rheumatism at the time. 'It was my first experience in police detention for any reason and was certainly very unpleasant.' But, she said, 'detention will not deter me from continuing in the (street) committee.'

---

**Mother of a young detainee shows the pain of separation. Many found support and help when they attended social gatherings organised by the DPSC.**



**OVERPAGE Women unite  
in a protest meeting.**

---

# WOMEN'S DAY SONG

U of MASS/AMHERST LIBRARY



Celebrate our women in campaigns  
Celebrate our women in the jails  
Celebrate our women over many fighting years  
Celebrate our women for their triumphs  
and for their tears.

There is no struggle  
from which women are exempt  
No struggle in which women  
do not play their part;  
Our struggle is in fact  
for women's day;  
To struggle for tomorrow  
is a woman's fight today.

Remember all our women in campaigns  
Remember all our women in the jails  
Remember all our women over many fighting years  
Remember all our women for their triumphs  
and for their tears

Fight for an Africa  
where women are no slaves  
Fight for an Africa where women  
do not waste their lives  
South Africa in fact  
is on its way to celebrate its freedom  
and to honour women's day.



FRONT COVER

**Women unite in a protest meeting.**

BACK COVER

**Banner for solidarity... at the last meeting  
of the DPSC before it was banned in February  
1988, friends write the names of prisoners  
and detainees on a banner dedicated to  
women in the struggle against apartheid.**

---



Originally published as

*A woman's place is in the struggle, not behind bars*  
by DPSC/Descom, Johannesburg, February 1988

This edition published by the

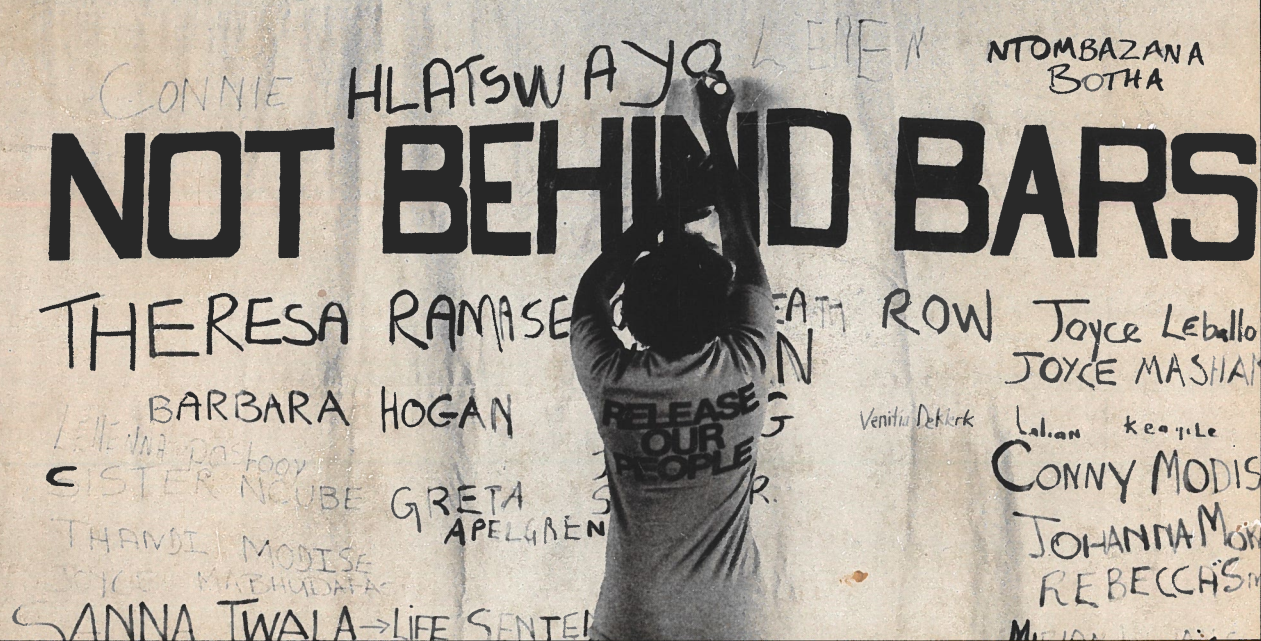
Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR)  
22 Coleman Fields, London N1 7AF, October 1988

© CIIR 1988

ISBN 1 85287 030 3



# A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE STRUGGLE



**CIR**

Catholic Institute for International Relations  
22 Coleman Fields, London N1 7AF

£2.95

ISBN 1 85287 030 3